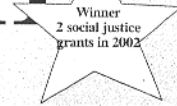


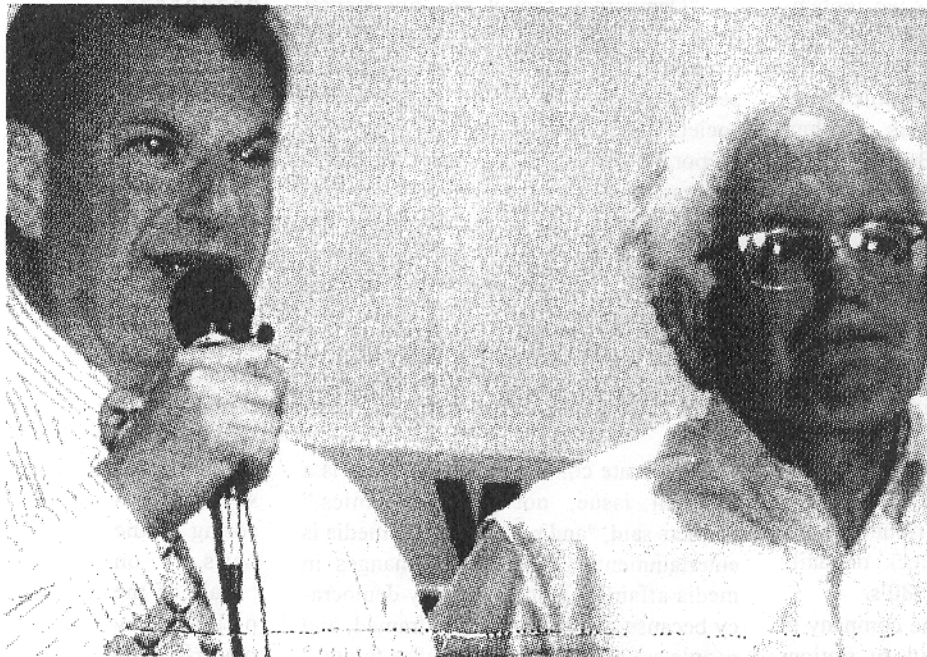


Street Light

on Poverty, Homelessness, Peace and Social Justice



Freedom of Speech Under Siege By Corporate Media



Bob Filner introduces fellow Representative Bernie Sanders from Vermont at a June town hall meeting, held at the Chula Vista Library, on "The Media and Democracy: Who is Controlling What You're Watching?" Both warned of the dangers to free speech and democracy by the recent FCC ruling which gives control to corporate media, without government oversight as to ownership, allowing for the possibility that one person or company could control all the television stations that reach over 50% of the U.S. population. Meanwhile, radio stations are already monopolized in many areas, including San Diego where the rabid, right-wing fanatics at Clear Channel control 14 stations.

(over)

By Cindy Delon

Like the rest of the corporate assault on the free-enterprise system, last month's Federal Communications Commission 3-2 vote by its right-wing majority, welds another link in the chain around democracy and paves the way for even greater concentration of media ownership and is a direct threat to freedom of speech in the United States,

While the trends toward corporate domination of entire areas of the U.S. economy are indeed frightening as we contemplate a new axis of evil: Wal-Mart, which will control the retail industry setting the price for all consumer goods while cheating and exploiting its workers, McDonalds' Burger-King-in-the-Box dictating the bulk of our prepared food costs and, now, with the recent FCC ruling, most of our news and information controlled by a fascist from Australia named Rupert Murdoch.

Already in San Diego a few companies hold virtual monopolies on media resources, particularly radio, where the rabid, right-wing, jackals at Clear Channel Entertainment, owned by an old friend of President Bush, controls 14 local stations and with the Union-Tribune, where the Copley's have had a lock on daily print journalism since the 1980's.

The ruling means that one company or individual could control all tv stations reaching nearing half of U.S. homes.

Many people seem to forget that the airways are public property. As a national resource these airways should be used to strengthen democracy and free speech, to allow the voices of diverse, minority communities to be heard, rather than used for the personal profit of a few billionaire

media moguls.

Ignoring hundreds of thousands of e-mails and e-petitions, including a petition of 170,000 signatures organized by MoveOn.org, the FCC ruled that our local tv stations, newspaper, radio stations and cable provider could all be owned by one company, prompting Congressman Bernie Sanders, at a recent Chula Vista forum, to warn that the concentration of the media in fewer and fewer wealthy hands will mean the end of democracy.

"Democracy cannot be only market drive," he said, "Democracy is not selling a product, it is vital that we always have a serious discussion of the issues facing society." Rep. Sanders went on to say that corporate owned media will not fairly address issues like the need for universal health care and the fact that Americans are working far more hours for less money today than a decade ago. He mentioned that corporate media will not have reporters or guests who question corporate welfare, unfair tax advantages and other issues or products of their corporate owners.

"Corporate control of public issues is a political issue, not just economics," Sanders said, "and politics for the media is entertainment. These radical changes in media affairs is helping destroy democracy because the issues are not framed, and people are not told how to change things."

He noted that in Europe, and, even in the countries that make up the old Soviet Union, objective, public discourse in the media is important, "the function of the media is to tell the people the truth, not just follow the line of the government," he said, noting that Clear Channel not only censored stories unfavorable to the admin-

istration and kept alternative viewpoints off the airways, but organized pro-government rallies, forfeiting any pretense at objectivity or fairness. He noted that Fox Television lies about "balanced" coverage, and is merely an adjunct of the right-wing of the Republican Party.

Groups across the spectrum of political activism have opposed the concentrated corporate control of the news processes, from the liberal, public-interest group Common Cause to the National Rifle Association. All minority groups have expressed dismay at the ruling which will add to stifling diversity and censoring the news on behalf of the politically powerful and wealthy. In radio, the concentrated control is already dangerously high, causing Common Cause to warn that even the relative independence of the Internet could be threatened because many companies, including Clear Channel, broadcast their programs online. *****